

Activism Through NGO: A Case Study of Jagaran Media Center of Nepal

This article examines activism through NGO-led media interventions, focusing on Jagaran Media Center in Nepal. It highlights efforts toward Dalit empowerment, inclusive journalism, and social justice. The author, Laxman Singh, has conducted the first extensive PhD research on Nepalese and Indian Dalit political art, providing a unique scholarly perspective.

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Jagaran Media Center (JMC) is a prominent non-governmental organization established in 2000 and formally registered in 2001 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Founded and led by journalists from the Dalit community, JMC represents a significant initiative aimed at transforming media into a tool for social justice. The organization works at local, national, and international levels to eliminate caste-based discrimination and promote an inclusive, equitable, and secular society through media mobilization.

At its core, JMC focuses on strengthening the capacity of Dalit journalists and advocating for inclusive media practices. It actively promotes the inclusion of Dalit voices both in media institutions and in news content, ensuring that issues concerning Dalit and marginalized communities receive appropriate representation. Beyond media advocacy, JMC engages in broader themes such as human rights, gender equality, social inclusion, environmental justice, peacebuilding, and governance.

JMC has played a vital role in shaping inclusive media policy in Nepal. It collaborates with diverse groups, including Indigenous peoples, women, Madhesi, Muslim, and differently-abled communities. Its contributions have been recognized by the Government of Nepal, which included JMC representatives in high-level bodies such as the Inclusive Media Commission and the High-Level Mass Media Commission.

The organization's media initiatives are extensive and impactful. Its radio programs, such as *Katuwal* and *Sajha Pahal*, have been instrumental in raising awareness about caste discrimination, untouchability, and broader social issues like education, health, and empowerment. These programs adopt participatory formats, including interviews and community voices, making them accessible and engaging.

In television media, JMC produces programs like *Pahal Samabeshikaran*, which fosters dialogue on inclusion, and *Jagaran Bahas*, a weekly discussion platform addressing critical issues such as representation, gender equality, and human rights. Additionally, its storytelling initiatives provide a powerful platform for Dalit individuals to share lived experiences of exclusion and resilience, thereby challenging dominant narratives.

One of JMC's most influential productions is the tele-serial *Dalan*, which portrays the struggles and realities of Dalit communities. Broadcast nationwide, the series gained widespread recognition and inspired the formation of over 500 viewers' clubs across Nepal and abroad, turning media consumption into collective social engagement.

JMC has also effectively utilized digital platforms through social media campaigns, online news portals, and specialized platforms such as the Dalit Human Rights Portal. These

initiatives document and disseminate information on caste-based discrimination, enabling accountability and connecting affected communities with authorities and stakeholders.

Capacity building remains a central pillar of JMC's work. The organization has trained over 800 Dalit youths in journalism, equipping them with skills to participate in mainstream media. It also sensitizes non-Dalit journalists on issues of caste and inclusion, thereby fostering a more responsible media environment.

Furthermore, JMC actively engages in advocacy related to democracy, peace, and governance. It played a notable role during Nepal's 2006 democratic movement and continues to promote inclusive participation in political processes. Its work on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) emphasizes affirmative action and equitable representation as essential for achieving social justice.

The establishment of Radio Jagaran 93.6 MHz in Butwal marks another milestone, being the first radio station in South Asia run by the Dalit community. The station serves as a community hub, broadcasting issues related to marginalized groups and facilitating grassroots activism through local groups and information centers.

In a society deeply affected by caste hierarchies, where Dalits continue to face discrimination despite legal protections, JMC's work is both timely and transformative. By combining media, advocacy, and community engagement, Jagaran Media Center not only amplifies marginalized voices but also challenges structural inequalities, contributing significantly to the broader struggle for human rights and social justice in Nepal.